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Understanding the cultural antecedents of quality management in tourism

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antecedents

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the causes that have led to a rather fragmented view of quality management among tourism marketing organisations in Germany. The aim is to identify and to interpret the relevant societal cultural factors underpinning German management. The paper examines the influence of culture on the perception and performance of quality management in tourism organisations.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on a data set which previously explored and analysed the diffusion of total quality management in German public tourism marketing organisations. In this paper, the data set has been re-analysed and mapped against societal cultural elements. The analysis evaluates cultural factors that influence perceptions among German tourism marketing organisations on quality management.

Findings – This paper identifies cultural aspects that influence the perception and performance of quality in tourism organisations. The findings relate cultural antecedents in three identified core issues of quality: underdeveloped training and motivational events for staff; unbalanced strategic positioning in terms of quality; and weak commitment to standards and guidelines.

Practical implications – The implications that can be drawn from the findings of this paper are twofold. First, the results could be integrated into future educational policies in tourism. Second, implications and learning for tourism managers from this paper relate to a holistic, integrative, and systems-based approach to quality management instead of only implementing individual quality aspects.

Originality/value – This paper is one of the first studies to consider the influences of societal culture on the perception and performance of quality management in the German tourism sector.

Keywords Germany, Tourism, Total quality management, Culture, Holistic quality management, Tourism organizations

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Tourism researchers agree that tourism service providers rely on the customer's positive assessment of service quality during their travel experience in order to stay competitive (Augustyn and Ho, 1998; Weiermair and Fuchs, 1999; Robledo, 2001; Fuchs and Weiermair, 2004). During all phases of travelling and the frequent interactions at the service encounter between visitors and members of the tourism service providers (e.g. tourist information, visitor centres, or regional marketing organisations), the customer's perception of the received service quality is crucial for the existence and success of their business. Within any organisation, it is the balance between the technical and social systems which is fundamental to an holistic quality management approach. This is not only significant for the tourism marketing organisation itself, but also for the entire tourist destination, regardless of whether the service provider is situated in the public or private sector.

There are distinct industrial sectors that perceive and perform only single aspects of quality (Wilkinson and Witcher, 1993; Smith, 2011); hence their idea of quality is more fragmented than holistic. Gaps have been identified between the



claims of quality management researchers and operational quality tourism management (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). In particular, public tourism marketing organisations have been criticised for their ignorance, or at least late adoption, of holistic quality concepts such as total quality management (TQM) or other business excellence frameworks such as European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) (Woods and Deegan, 2006; Litosa *et al.*, 2011).

Despite the fact that quality management is vital for the success of tourism organisations (Kandampully, 2000) there is also evidence that various organisational barriers form obstacles that prevent organisations from adopting a quality management system (Bruhn, 2008; Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002; Johnston, 2008; Soltani *et al.*, 2010). Those obstacles have been found on an individual basis as well as on an organisational level and include lack of knowledge, negative emotions (Bruhn, 2008), or the lack of ability and motivation (Grugulis and Bevitt, 2002). For the tourism sector, organisational obstacles perceived by management as hindering the adoption of a holistic quality management approach in the tourism sector include limited time, resources, and knowledge (Muskat, 2007). External barriers, such as political settings and the conflicting roles and responsibilities of public tourism marketing organisations, have been additional contributors to a rather conservative adoption of new leadership approaches (Neumann, 2005; Becker, 2003; Freyer, 2001; Mundt, 2001). Whereas previous research has examined barriers on an organisational and structural level, this paper investigates what influence culture has on the perception of quality management in German tourism organisations.

Researchers reinforce the view that societal culture has a significant influence on management behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; House *et al.*, 2002; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars, 1985; Kluckhohn, 1954). The commonly used definition of the term culture in relation to management studies is a shared set of meanings and includes beliefs, norms, and behaviours (Aycan *et al.*, 2000; Kluckhohn, 1954; Schein, 1992). On a societal level “it includes what has worked in the history of the society – tools, concepts, ideas, norms, values, prejudices, standard operating procedures, unstated assumptions, patterns of sampling information from the environment – that most members of society teach to the next generation” (Triandis, 2004, pp. 29-30). However, only a few studies have examined the influence of cultural antecedents on quality management in the field of tourism. Tourism studies instead concentrate on exploring the cultural impact in terms of the service quality. Studies have concentrated on the demand side and explored the impact of national culture on the tourists’ perception (e.g. Atilgan *et al.*, 2003; Furrer *et al.*, 2000; Kee-Fu Tsang and Ap, 2007; Mattila, 2000). Despite this strong focus on the impact of national culture on tourists’ perception, there is only little research published examining the influence of societal culture on tourism management and organisational practice. Hence, “relatively little systematic knowledge exists with respect to the impact of one’s cultural belonging upon the perception and evaluation of and/or satisfaction with service quality in the context of hospitality and tourism” (Weiermair, 2000, p. 397). Hence, there is agreement that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the impact of societal culture on quality management, as “quite a number of conceptual and methodological questions in cross-cultural research have remained unanswered” so far (Drenth, 2004, p. 3). Previous studies have shown that the influence of culture has often been simplified and national cultural differences ignored, especially in management literature (Adler and Jelinek, 1986).

The study addresses this current gap in research, in particular the understanding of culture as a variable in tourism services. The aim of this study is to identify societal

antecedents underpinning German tourism management practice. Section 2 elaborates and synthesises the relevant literature on the development and perception of holistic quality management whilst Section 3 analyses the impact of culture as a variable on quality management; it concludes with three relevant cultural themes which influence German perceptions of quality management. Section 4 explains the methodological approach for this paper, consisting of two stages. Section 5 maps and evaluates the impact of societal culture on quality management in tourism, and Section 6 offers conclusions to this study.

2. Holistic quality management

In order to elucidate the requirement of a holistic quality approach such as TQM or business excellence concepts, it is useful to consider the evolution of research in quality management. Studies in the field date back to the beginning of the twentieth century, with the emergence of the concept of “Scientific Management” (Taylor, 1911), which is considered to be the basis of quality control. From 1930 onward, industrial production has been systematically analysed, implementing statistical operations to control outcomes. In Germany, norms and standards soon became highly relevant, especially in the production sector; goods were perceived as reliable and highly prized (Walgenbach, 2001). Thus, quality management approaches began from a technical and statistical premise. A second phase of research in quality management also included the human side of organisations, especially within the development of TQM, which led to a broad debate on the integration of the organisation’s social system, especially in academia (Freiling, 2001).

Nevertheless, the construct of organisational quality remains difficult to formulate (Bruhn, 2008; Garvin, 1988); “quality” remains perceived as a complex theoretical construct. The theoretical debate thus continues over adequate measures, especially with regard to fulfilling the requirements of a holistic quality approach (Juran, 1951, 1989; Feigenbaum, 1988). Whilst, historically, quality management was based on the achievement of good results, holistic quality management seeks to improve the process, as well (Oakland, 2003). The traditional view of quality management has been highly criticised, as dominant areas of research, especially in the field of engineering, have focused on mechanistic and technological aspects of quality. According to Ulich (2005), the “technical system” paradigm assumes that humans adapt to technical aspects, such as facilities, means of production, and technology, around them.

By contrast, the “social system” paradigm implies that organisational members influence each other. Information and communication processes connect staff members, proving that both organisational subsystems can only be optimised jointly. Within a holistic quality concept, not only should the technological or economic aspects of any organisation be taken into account, but also the social system, integrating employees’ values and needs (Ulrich, 1997). The holistic quality approach also requires overcoming the previous product and producer-oriented perception of quality (Garvin, 1988), moving towards a customer-oriented approach. Zink argues that due to increased organisational change, the component of employee participation has become more relevant and, with respect to organisational quality, “more holistic concepts are needed to realize a sustainable success” (Zink, 2008, p. 793). Moreover, Stauss (2001) criticises the prevalent reductionist understanding of customer orientation in the field of quality management research.

One concept which operationalises holistic quality management is TQM. It integrates the two organisational systems – social and technical – and has been

used to define holistic quality management in this research, as it balances out the customer, process and employee dimensions of the organisation (Seghezzi, 2003; Simon, 2000; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 1997; Oess, 1994): "TQM is a comprehensive approach to improving competitiveness, effectiveness, and flexibility through planning, organizing and understanding each activity, and involving each individual at each level. It is useful for all types of organization" (Oakland, 2003, p. 41). TQM empowers the social system to integrate all relevant groups, consequently reducing the previously dominant technical orientation and leading to equalising the two systems (Rothlauf, 2001; Meffert, 2000). Within the holistic approach to quality management, it is of relevance to not only discuss quality management from an organisational behaviour perspective, but also to emphasise the importance of marketing research in this area, since customer satisfaction is the starting point of any organisational improvement towards holistic quality.

After operationalising holistic quality management through TQM in general, the next step is to explore how this approach can be applied to tourism organisations; this is further explained in Section 4.2.

3. The influence of societal cultural elements on the adoption of TQM by German tourism organisations

Despite the benefits of a holistic quality management approach, German tourism organisations have been slow to adopt the concept. Compared with other industries, most tourism organisations have either been late adopters or have not integrated this concept at all (Muskat, 2007). Internal barriers such as lack of time, insufficient human resources, as well as insufficient knowledge and awareness were among the major barriers for German tourism organisations which led to late or non-adoption of the TQM concept (Muskat, 2007).

3.1 The influence of societal culture on management

Among cultural theorists, there is broad agreement that societal culture has a strong impact on management and leadership in a given country (Hofstede, 1980; House *et al.*, 2002; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars, 1985; Kluckhohn, 1954). For Triandis (2004), the influence of culture on management is immense, as "there is no psychological process that is not shaped, to some extent, by culture" (p. 30). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) "value orientation theory" hypothesises that each culture seeks to solve human problems, and that the distinctiveness of each is reflected in the different approaches each culture adopts to solve these problems. New cultural elements, such as innovative concepts, ideas, or concrete tools, are usually adopted when providing apparent benefits for a certain culture; however, the main pre-existing methods or tools also persist (Triandis, 2004). The overall prerequisite to trigger the adaptation process is the willingness of society and its institutions to change (Tschurtschenthaler, 2005). Research also shows that the pressure to change is mostly accentuated in economically critical times. The necessity for any innovation is then recognised because existing patterns are no longer adequate (Meffert, 1999). The diffusion theory of management concepts also suggests that organisations become active in this adoption process as the prospect of gaining competitive advantage grows, especially when encouraged by positive role models of innovative enterprises in the same industrial sector (Freiling, 2001).

It should be acknowledged that, although it is often not easy to draw distinct boundaries between cultures (Clyne, 1994), certain patterns can still be identified,

especially in the evolution of quality management. Freiling's (2001) research identifies differences between national cultures and the pace at which innovations are adopted. Japanese organisations have been particularly recognised as early adopters, having embraced the TQM model, while other nations have been considerably slower in taking up this concept (Freiling, 2001). European organisations lacked the knowledge that Japanese firms had, therefore traditional concepts dominated organisational leadership approaches in Europe (Freiling, 2001). In addition to those management concepts about organisational quality, marketing should also be taken into account in order to understand quality from an integrative perspective.

The literature review shows that the concept of national culture is frequently discussed in management literature and, although the discussion above has demonstrated that the impact of societal culture on management practice is highly relevant, there is very little debate on how societal culture influences tourism organisations and their management behaviour. It is also evident that a lot of tourism research is concentrated on understanding the cultural impact on visitor behaviour (Atilgan *et al.*, 2003; Kandampully, 2000; Kee-Fu Tsang and Ap, 2007). Studies have also explored the influence of particular national cultures on visitor behaviour and visitor satisfaction. For example, Kee-Fu Tsang and Ap (2007) contrast western and Asian tourist perceptions in terms of service quality. Another study examines the relationship of cross-cultural interaction at the service encounter (Weiermair, 2000). Mattila's (2000) study concentrates on Asian tourists in the hospitality sector service encounter. A further perspective is the visitor and host relationship, explored by Reisinger and Turner (1998) when investigating the implication of cross-cultural interactions between visitor and host.

Marketing literature concentrating on service quality models have been developed by Grönroos (1984) and Parasuraman *et al.* (1985, 1988) arguing for assessments from the customer's perspective. The customer holds the overall argument for the existence of tourism organisations and, with this the relevance of organisational quality. The model proposed by Grönroos (1984, 1990) highlights the role of technical and functional quality resulting in outcome quality. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985, 1988) developed the SERVQUAL model with five gaps indicating the distance between customers' expectations and their experience. Building on this, both Fornell and Anderson explored how customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty and profitability (Fornell, 1992; Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Hallowell, 1996).

This paper contributes to the organisational debate on quality management, and explores the societal cultural implications for the organisational dimension of quality, as there has been slight discussion in tourism research arguing from this perspective. The following section, therefore, analyses the cultural societal elements influencing quality management practice in German tourism organisations.

3.2 *The German perception of quality management*

The international perception of quality management in German management and leadership is mainly composed by preciseness, punctuality, and industrial efficiency (Herberg, 2001; Oess, 1993; Walgenbach, 2001). These indicators are predominantly measured through the DIN EN ISO norm series, which has been the outstanding quality framework since the beginning of its institutionalisation in the 1970s (Herberg, 2001). The German Institute for Standardization (DIN) is the official national standards body developing and implementing Germany's technical standards. It is the country's ISO member body, representing the International Organization of Standardization.

If the DIN standard in question has been adopted as a European standard and an international ISO standard, it is termed DIN EN ISO. Within the context of quality management, it is the ISO 9000 series that allows companies to certify their quality management system (Poksinska *et al.*, 2002).

With the DIN EN ISO standardisation system in place, attempts have been made to certify tourism organisations according to its criteria (Augustyn, 1998; Augustyn and Pheby, 2000; Keller, 2000; Eraqi, 2008), even if more specific quality certificates like EFQM (cp. Section 4.2) and a range of specific tourism certificates are available (Bruhn and Hadwich, 2004; Dreyer and Freyer, 2004).

The composition of the norm series, and the system's intent to develop quantitative measurement of outputs, correlate with the German mindset towards quality, which consists of statistical analyses and improving product quality (Downey and Lucena, 2004). The critique of this quality attitude points out that the "social system" of organisational quality is not fully developed (Walgenbach, 2001; Herberg, 2001). Furthermore, Staudt and Hinterwaller (1982) note that the understanding of quality in Germany is too static and is, therefore, rarely able to adapt to customers' changing wishes and expectations.

In the German workplace, the engineer has historically been perceived as the cultural hero, unlike in the USA or Japan, where the manager is so regarded (Hofstede, 1993; Downey and Lucena, 2005). When compared with other nations, the German education system has some distinctive features. A recognised apprenticeship exists, consisting of alternating practical work and classroom exercises for a period of two or three years (Gispen, 1988, 1990). As a result, Germany has a number of respected organisational leaders without a higher tertiary education (further impacts will be discussed and evaluated in Section 5.2).

Another difference in management education between Germany and other nations is that it is only since the 1990s that business schools have started to emerge (Hofstede, 1993). Despite the fact that German management theory concentrates on formal systems (Walgenbach, 2001; Herberg, 2001) rather than conceptual management approaches (Hofstede, 1993), relying on the apprentice system and educating engineers rather than managers, has not set Germany back in comparison with other leading economies.

The section above identified national characteristics through mapping the literature. It identified three societal cultural themes which can be seen as influencing the German perception of quality management:

- *Cultural theme 1:* the historically founded focus on preciseness, punctuality, industrial efficiency, product standards, and norms has continuously strengthened the organisation's technical system.
- *Cultural theme 2:* the organisational hero has traditionally been the engineer. Consequently, the technological system is perceived as more important than the organisation's social system.
- *Cultural theme 3:* careers in tourism have traditionally not required a university degree; this is evident in the age group currently managing public tourism organisations.

Consequently, the research aims are:

- to analyse and evaluate whether these three cultural themes influence the adoption of quality management; and

- to identify if those three societal cultural themes form obstacles to achieving a balance between an organisation's social and technical systems.

4. Methodological approach

4.1 Method: thematic analysis of quality and related cultural themes

Three cultural themes have been identified through mapping the literature in a structured way; a "process of analyzing data according to commonalities" (Gibson and Brown, 2009, p. 127) was adopted. The next stage was to undertake an analysis of the themes "culture" and "quality" and, in particular, how they relate to each other. In order to achieve this it was important to work on data already grounded in one of the ideas and then apply the other lens to it, thereby enabling the relationships to be established more clearly. Consequently, an extant study which had determined a conceptual model of quality indicators was adopted to be re-analysed searching for the cultural implications. Muskat (2007) developed a model of TQM for tourism organisations which focused on the factors which enabled or prevented the adoption of TQM. In this paper the cultural themes identified are mapped against the existing findings pertaining to the perception and application of quality management for German tourism organisations. We will briefly outline how the original data was developed and then explain how the data has been re-analysed in order to elaborate the culture/quality relationship to be found in this German example.

4.2 Conceptualisation of TQM for tourism organisations

The operationalisation of the theoretical construct of holistic quality for tourism organisations was based upon two existing frameworks: the business excellence model EFQM (EFQM, 2010) and the Swiss quality concept QforYou (Müller, 2004). The EFQM excellence model, created in 1991 by the European Foundation for Quality Management, is made up of nine elements: leadership; policy and strategy; people; partnerships and resources; processes; people results; customer results; society results and key performance results (Bou-Llusar *et al.*, 2009). Müller's (2004) QforYou model for tourism organisations consists of quality criteria on three levels which reflect the three stages of quality performance used to certify tourism operators in Switzerland. The first, most basic, level consists of the awareness of visitors' expectations and their satisfaction, how the organisation's members work together as a team and how companies collaborate with partner organisations. It also encompasses how the organisations cater for their staff needs, how lost visitor satisfaction can be restored, how companies undertake complaint management and analysis, how they ask for customers' wishes, and how they communicate with staff members. The second, more elaborate, quality level includes advanced training of staff, publication of the company's mission statement and goals, feedback to staff, supervision and management by objectives, managing the company's reputation and image, cooperation with other tourism organisations, external communication, and friendly and motivated staff. This second level incorporates the criteria used when tourism operators conduct visitor and staff surveys. The third, and highest, achievable level of quality performance within the QforYou model then asks for process orientation and certification by a quality management system (Müller, 2004). Whereas the EFQM model is applicable to various kinds of organisations, regardless of their sector, size, or other features, the QforYou concept was specifically designed to assess quality aspects of tourism service providers.

Muskat used both models to develop a model identifying quality dimensions which would explain the specific characteristics of Germany's publicly funded tourism service

organisations. The EFQM framework was useful to identify the four dimensions of organisational quality which were identified as relevant for these organisations: the overall leadership dimension, employee orientation, customer orientation and process orientation. The QforYou concept provided the 14 specific indicators to demonstrate the dimensions. The criteria of reliability for extracting those indicators had the focus on making organisational quality measurable even for micro-sized service organisations. The resultant model (Figure 1) demonstrates that every indicator and each of the four dimensions of quality make an important contribution to a holistic quality approach. Just as all the dimensions rely upon, and influence each other, so every indicator contributes towards a holistic approach. However, in operational terms, it is recognised that cost intensive components in particular such as accreditation, could be less applicable.

To test the model a quantitative survey was used to identify which of the elements were or were not present in the tourism organisations and, if so how important they were considered to be. A database of all German public tourism organisations was generated from the contact details of tourism marketing organisations at the International Tourism Fair 2003 in Berlin. These were combined with available address information on the internet, ensuring that tourism organisations at federal, state, and municipal levels were all incorporated. The last step guaranteed the data quality and included the mapping of the collected data with all contact details published by Kaupert's database on German tourist information and visitor centres (Adressbuch-Gesellschaft Berlin, 2003). As a first result an overall population of 5,399 ($N_1 = 5,399$) public tourism organisations were identified, most consisting of those tourism marketing organisations which were in day-to-day contact with visitors, such as visitor centres, tourist information, and destination management organisations, but also the main regional and state tourism organisations. As the sampling method consisted of a census, all 5,399 were invited to participate in the study and $n_1 = 900$ tourism organisations responded to the survey (response rate 17 per cent). They represented all public governance levels with the majority having one to five staff members (Muskat, 2007).

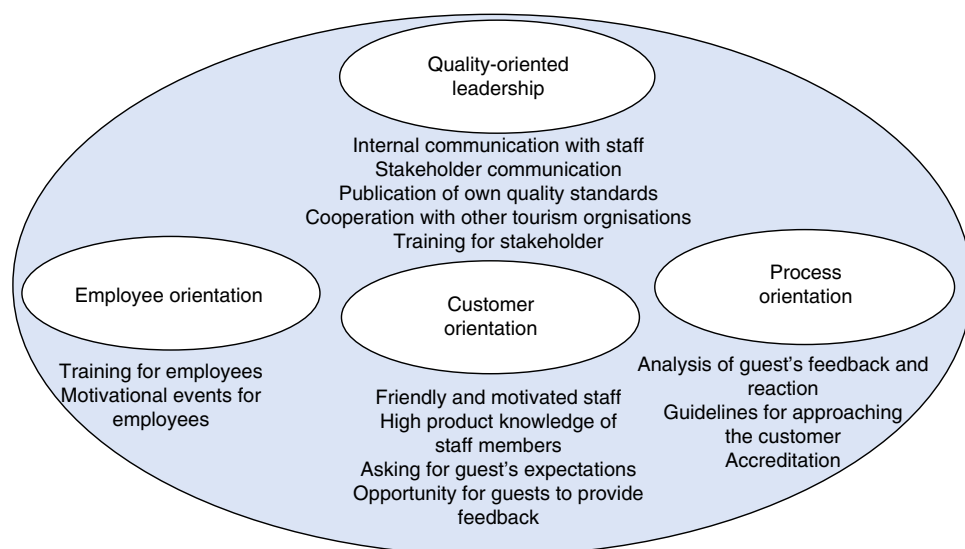


Figure 1.
Conceptual model of
quality indicators

Source: Muskat (2007)

4.3 The perception of quality management for tourism organisations

The survey and data analysis with SPSS identified which of those 14 quality indicators were perceived as being of high or low importance, as well as to what extent they were performed by the responding tourism organisations (Muskat, 2007). Table I

Perceived value	Quality indicator	Synthesis of implications of quality management on perception and performance
Little importance	Accreditation Guidelines Motivating events for staff Publication of standards	These indicators are underdeveloped or ignored components, they are not considered to contribute to holistic quality management Guidelines and publication of standards as well as the accreditation of quality would enable transparency for both the customer and employees, and provide guests with tangibles to reduce their insecurity about the expected service Motivating events for staff members would strengthen the organisation's social system; however, the lack of a perceived value illustrates a major weakness. Furthermore, the close correlation between the employee and customer satisfaction is not recognised
Little performance	Accreditation Guidelines Motivating events Stakeholder training	These measures are the least performed of all 14 quality indicators It is acknowledged that the certification process needs a lot of resources and accreditation can be cost-intensive. However, internal guidelines that enable transparency and reliability for both visitors and staff members are not costly Stakeholder training would enable the entire tourist destination to learn to meet market demands and strengthen relationships between the various tourism operators
Gap	Stakeholder training Motivating events Staff training Publication of standards	The identified gap between the perceived importance and the actual performance of these measures of a holistic organisational quality identifies underlying barriers to their application The highest barriers to not performing were training and motivating. Reasons might be that the managers of the organisation were not adequately trained The strategic view is directed more to building cooperation, rather than balancing the internal needs of the organisation
High importance	Friendly staff Cooperation Opportunity for guest's complaint Product knowledge of staff Analysis of complaints	These indicators are seen to be the most important for a holistic quality management. The emphasis lies on strategic thinking outside the rather reactive approach to customer service. The opportunity for guests' complaints is rated higher than proactively asking for customer expectations Interestingly, product knowledge is rated as technical information, an aspect that is clearly identified to belong to the organisation's technical system. However, as staff training is ranked significantly lower it is questionable where the employee's knowledge is coming from

(continued)

Table I.
Perceived value of
quality indicators and
their implications

Perceived value	Quality indicator	Synthesis of implications of quality management on perception and performance
High performance	Cooperation Friendly staff Opportunity for guest's complaint Product knowledge of staff	These aspects of quality were mostly applied by the respondent They vary only slightly from the perception of importance; cooperation building is performed by nearly the same number of organisations that found them important. The reason why external cooperation with other tourism organisations has become the key activity might lie in the broad discussion and demonstrated benefit of this strategic idea. The strong emphasis in this area has been very beneficial for most organisations. However, it also has led to unbalanced management, a rather reactive approach towards customer management, and ignorance of the importance of employee satisfaction within the organisation

Table I.

Source: Muskat (2007)

synthesises the findings of this phase into five value levels and summarises the implications these quality measures have on perception and performance.

The analysis of the adoption of TQM in German public tourism organisations identified major themes around the perception and application of a holistic quality management concept:

- *Quality theme 1:* training and motivational events are perceived and performed as less important.
- *Quality theme 2:* strategic positioning in terms of quality is unbalanced.
- *Quality theme 3:* there is little commitment to standards and guidelines.

Having developed the cultural themes (cp. p. 8) through the literature review and having explained how the quality themes have emerged from the data of the previous work (Muskat, 2007), the next step was to bring both thematic groups together. This has been done through a thematic analysis by applying the cultural themes as an additional layer of investigation and then referring back to the quality themes. In order to find concrete evidence for the quality aspects the 14 quality indicators (cp. Table I) have again been applied. Each of the three cultural themes has been mapped with each of the three quality themes to be able to explain how societal culture is an antecedent to the perception and application of quality management in German tourism organisations. The findings of this mapping are displayed in the next section.

5. Evaluating the impact of culture on quality management in tourism

5.1 Cultural antecedents on quality theme 1: training and motivational events are perceived and performed as less important

The data reveal that motivational staff events and training for stakeholders are some of the lowest scoring indicators regarding the organisation's perception of contributing to

a holistic quality framework. The same situation is reflected by the gap between perceived importance and actual performance, where training and motivational events for staff and stakeholders show the highest discrepancies.

This clearly indicates that a key component of the organisation's social system is underdeveloped. At the same time, actual product knowledge, in this context being representative of the technical organisational system, is rated significantly higher. While motivational events for staff members would strengthen the organisation's social system, the lack of a perceived value of such events indicates internal barriers in this area. Furthermore, the close correlation between the employee and customer satisfaction is not recognised. The cultural basis for this quality theme is the historically strong engineering focus within quality management. Such focus was required for the development of excellent products, especially in the automotive and production industries. The strongly developed organisational technical system has been evolving due to specific managerial personality characteristics such as preciseness and the cultural perception of the high status of technical professions. However, this has resulted in a strong emphasis on the technical systems of organisations (e.g. strong product quality). High product knowledge is ranked significantly higher in the data than, for example, training and motivational events for employees.

Tourism organisations' business plans depend on an equally strong, developed social system. Activities for staff empowerment, such as motivational events and training, have become essential for the destination's success, especially when including stakeholders as contributors to this success. The results described in this paper show that this area is underrepresented and there is a need to balance these aspects in order to achieve a holistic quality management approach.

5.2 Cultural antecedents on quality theme 2: strategic positioning in terms of quality is unbalanced

The 900 responding tourism organisations ranked the development of cooperation with other tourism providers as offering the greatest value to their quality management (they actually apply this priority). This indicates strategic thinking outside the organisation to enhance and gain a variety of competitive advantages for their respective destinations. Regarding strategic thinking in customer management, however, respondents reveal a rather reactive internal approach: three quarters of the respondent organisations indicated that they had provided opportunities for guest complaints. A smaller number of organisations proactively ask the visitors about their expectations, and only one-third publishes their quality standards.

Although they would facilitate customer communication, make the provided services tangible, and reduce customers' perceived risk, the mentioned indicators are difficult to find. This rather contrary strategic thinking could be due to several factors. Since there has been an intensive discussion on the explicit value of the development of strategic cooperation, this broad and partially mainstream discussion has also been accepted into operational practice.

Cultural elements that may have caused this lack of holistic strategic thinking are seen in the fact that the tourism sector's educational efforts have been aimed at practicality for a long time. Managers, owner-managers, and leaders have not necessarily been expected to complete a tertiary education degree. This is still perceived positively and has encouraged a pragmatic career development structure. From a management and leadership perspective, however, it might cause a barrier to further organisational learning, as the theoretical framework and the

necessary acceptance from a cultural perspective might be missing in some instances.

Traditionally, managers of tourist information, visitor centres, or even regional marketing organisations would not have received tertiary education; thus, they might not see any need for lifelong learning. The rapid development on the demand side of tourism, however, requires learning and the adaptation of knowledge to participate effectively in the marketplace. For this reason, training and other learning activities might enable destination leaders to gain broader awareness and help to balance or right size their quality management activities for market expectations.

5.3 Cultural antecedents on quality theme 3: little commitment to standards and guidelines

Standards and norms are perceived as essential in many industry sectors. However, in public tourism, accreditation of a quality management system and guidelines for customer service are perceived as the two least important quality features. Fewer than one in five tourism organisations engage in any certification activities or provide any customer service guidelines. These quality components require a specific knowledge of organisational and process improvement and an awareness of the strategic importance of those process measures. Less than one-third of the responding organisations actually publish their quality standards. This might imply that standards would have been formalised prior to publishing. However, the data showed that only a small fraction of the organisations use particular guidelines for customer service.

Since the cultural perception of German management suggests a high dedication to the norm series (Walgenbach, 2001; Herberg, 2001), the finding that tourism organisations demonstrate little commitment to standards and guidelines is remarkable. In this case, there may well be a specific “tourism sector culture” with a different perception and evaluation of the necessity of standards and guidelines. This suggests a need for further research on the specific sectoral culture of public tourism organisations. This result contradicts the assumption that standards and norms are perceived as essential for the deployment of quality management, especially in Germany. While it can be argued that certification is likely to be cost-intensive, the implementation of guidelines and the publication of certain standards would not add extra costs. On the contrary, it would lead to making the tourism organisation’s services more tangible for visitors.

6. Conclusion and implications

6.1 Conclusion

These findings show that societal culture significantly influences tourism organisations’ implementation of quality management, and that the adoption of a management concept such as TQM is a highly complex process. In this way, the paper contributes a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the role of culture on the attitudes and practices of tourism organisations with respect to quality management. The literature review confirmed that the essential managerial aspect of tourism service providers is to meet their customers’ expectations in order to operate successfully. Managing customer expectations needs a clear internal commitment towards the quality of their own organisations. For tourism marketing organisations, internal quality needs to focus on customer, employee, and process management, combined with reflective leadership. To balance needs and manage the organisation effectively, a holistic approach towards quality is required, which combines both the organisation’s technical and social systems.

The analysis of the literature synthesised three cultural themes: (C1) the historically founded focus on preciseness, punctuality, and industrial efficiency product standards and norms (C2), the organisational hero has traditionally been the engineer, and (C3) careers in tourism have traditionally not required a university degree. In terms of a holistic quality framework, previous data showed that the following areas of German tourism organisations are underdeveloped: (Q1) training and motivational events (Q2), strategic positioning in terms of quality, and (Q3) minimal commitment to standards and guidelines.

The discussion section of this paper evaluated the themes of culture and quality with the purpose of crystallising the cultural antecedents of quality management for German tourism organisations. The discussion has led to the following conclusions:

- The historically founded focus on preciseness, punctuality, and industrial efficiency product standards and norms has continuously strengthened organisations' technical systems. This theme showed that the social aspects of training and motivational activities are undervalued. The analysis showed that the ubiquitous engineering focus in Germany has led to a dominant technical system within organisations and an underdeveloped social system. The strongly developed organisational technical system has been evolving due to specific managerial personality characteristics, such as preciseness and the cultural perception of the high status of the technical professions.
- The organisational hero has traditionally been the engineer. Consequently, the technological system is perceived as more important than the organisation's social system. This theme discussed the fact that tourism organisations are less responsive to standards and guidelines. This, however, indicates a rather sector-specific culture within the field of tourism; this element contrasts with German society's general management view.
- Careers in tourism have traditionally not required a university degree; this is evident in the age group currently managing the public tourism organisations. Such a tertiary degree might have benefited managers through exposure to some operational aspects of destination management, and through awareness the importance of strategic management and, ultimately, a holistic quality management approach. The rather pragmatic approach to education in tourism, which has historically been considered a "hands-on" apprenticeship equal to a tertiary education, has led to an imbalanced perception of the value of different quality indicators, as the analysis in this paper has shown. However, the specific institutional culture of the tourism sector is also apparent, which might be more important than the prevailing societal culture, as seen by the lack of compliance with standards and guidelines.

6.2 Implications for education policy, management, and limitations

The implications that can be drawn from the findings and the concluding notes of this paper are twofold. First, the results could be integrated into future educational policies in tourism. Germany's technical system strength is an asset, but just as important is strengthening organisations' social systems, which is notably underestimated or undervalued within German tourism. Hence, an understanding of the importance of the organisation's social system components should be infused into tourism educational policies. Ideas and innovative concepts of integrating and conceptualising related soft skills into tourism curricula on various educational

levels could include a stronger focus on human resources management and organisational behaviour. In order to also reflect the holism of management theory and practice, consumer behaviour training should be integrated with the long-term aim of strengthening the tourism sector.

Second, the implications and learning for tourism managers from this paper relate to a holistic, integrative, and systems-based approach to quality management instead of only implementing individual quality aspects (such as inter-company collaborations and enhancing product knowledge). This paper intends to create awareness that societal cultural aspects also influence tourism managers. In this context, the study revealed a strong focus on the technical aspect of the organisational system, which is chiefly explained by the historical development of the German economy. The study acknowledges that German understanding of quality has been shaped through DIN EN ISO norms and their use and development within the German automotive industry (Kaas, 1997; Herberg, 2001). Through this evolution of industry and national culture, both a focus on product quality and technical and functional approaches have emerged which were historically strengthened (Oess, 1993). Future innovative management, however, should focus on balancing social and technical systems.

Main limitations and directions for future research. The present research relies on a qualitative analysis using secondary data to conduct a thematic analysis. Future studies, therefore, could evaluate and further develop societal cultural antecedents associated with holistic quality management using primary data sets of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Another idea for future research is to conduct a similar study in other cultural contexts, as this study was undertaken to better understand the particular case of German tourism organisations.

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